

Plains of Ash and Fields of Glass

by Billybobjoe47s

Category: Halo

Genre: Adventure, Tragedy

Language: English

Characters: Jun-A266/Noble Three, SPARTAN-B312/Noble Six

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2012-12-12 01:09:34

Updated: 2013-07-02 02:58:11

Packaged: 2016-04-27 03:54:29

Rating: T

Chapters: 8

Words: 7,818

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Many thought Noble 6 died on Reach. But some, no matter how few, know the truth. This is the recently declassified story of what really happened on Reach. Be warned. This is a story of violence, of hate, and of pain. This is the story of a struggle to survive on a dying planet. This is the story of Noble 6.

1. Session 1: Redemption

Plains of Ash and Fields of Glass

By Brennan Theler

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A/N: Hello my readers! This is a prequel of sorts to my first story, All Things in Heaven and Earth, explaining exactly why Noble 6 is still in the land of the living.

_While this will likely be updated more often than ATIHAE, the updates will be shorter, so make sure to check back often!

>

_Comment or PM me for anything you want to know or rail on me for.

>

Run classrec001216974. â€| Authorization confirmed. Beginning playbackâ€|.

START RECORDING

CLASSIFIED: Hello, Noble 6. This is a classified, Level-4 debriefing of your experiences on Reach. So, let's start at the beginning. As

the Prowler _UNSC Navajo _went out-system, the last feed from your helmet camera was you beginning a last stand, surrounded by Elites. How did you escape that certain death?

(2 minutes of silence)

CLASSIFIED: Any time now.

(3 minutes of silence)

NOBLE 6: I remember that day. I remember it all too wellâ€¦

He closed his eyes as he saw the dagger plunged towards his face. His good arm was held down by another Elite, and he couldn't feel his legs. He could, however, feel the pool of bloodâ€”his ownâ€”he was lying in.

However, his acceptance was broken by a familiar sound, that of a highly-modified sniper rifle. The Elite about to end his life with an energy dagger was blown away, the dagger cutting his cheek instead of burying itself in his forehead. The other Elites reared up, mandibles flaring. Another shot sounded, followed by two more rapid-fire bullets imbedding themselves in each Elite's cranium.

The other Elites had already left by Phantom, as they thought (and rightly so) that a single, badly injured SPARTAN with no ammunition or explosives would be able to be handled by a full squad of Ultras and Zealots. However, a second, near-full strength opponent changed the equation badly out of favor for the small squad.

With half their number already done in by either Noble 6 or the new enemy, the remaining 8 roared as they looked around the dusty battlefield for their new opponent. However, another 4 rapid-fire shots sounded, and four more Elites fell. However, the shots were from the same direction, and the few Elites left roared and charged in that direction. 4 more shots sounded, and the rest fell.

Walking out of the dust storm, his rescuer appeared, wearing a set of Green MJOLNIR armor, carrying a large sniper rifle, a pistol, and dozens of clips of ammunition. Various survival items were strewn around, attached to his armor and weapons.

Jun-A266 knelt down next to Noble 6, unlocking a large medical kit. In his distinctive accent, he said, "Good thing I showed up, eh Six? Just in time to ruin the Covvies' party."

Noble 6 felt his arms go numb, a relief from the obviously broken bone in his lower left arm. While his bones were tough, they were in no way invincible like SPARTAN-IIIs. Soldiers made for suicide missions didn't need unbreakable bones. Of more concern was his vision graying out, a symptom that he recognized as the beginning of death due to blood loss.

Jun tsked. "You really did a number on yourself, Six. But you also did a number on those Covvies, too. You deserve your reputation. Nearly a day, fighting alone, with no support and little ammo. That's quite the feat, even for a SPARTAN."

_Noble 6 couldn't concentrate on his words anymore, for his hearing

had started to fade in and out. All he heard was a meaningless string of sounds to his slowly asphyxiating brain._

The last thing he heard before falling into unconsciousness was, "I'm going to have my work cut out keeping you alive, Six. But you can't die on me. SPARTANS never die."

(1 minute of silence)

NOBLE 6: I'd like to stop for now.

CLASSIFIED: That's fine, Noble 6. We know that this is extreme emotional trauma for anyone, especially considering the later events and the current situation. Feel free to take the rest of the day off, but remember we will be continuing this tomorrow.

(3 minutes of silence, than scraping sounds of chairs moving)

CLASSIFIED: End recording.

END RECORDING

2. Session 2: Pain on a Dying World

Chapter 2:

A/N: Here's chapter two! Also, many of my other stories have been updated, so check them out and also my blog at .com

Feel free to email me any questions or comments at Allthingsinheavenandearth .

Enjoy!

Run classrec001216974. Authorization confirmed. Beginning playback..

START RECORDING

CLASSIFIED: Alright, Noble 6. Are you ready to continue with this debriefing?

NOBLE 6: Yes.

CLASSIFIED: Do you remember where you let off?

NOBLE 6: (laughter) Oh yes. The next time I was conscious.

Noble 6 woke to a jolting. Opening his eyes, he saw he was in a transport Wartog, lying in the back, supplies piled under and around him. Jun was driving the Warthog.

Looking around for his helmet, Noble 6 inadvertently jostled some supplies, and just barely managed to catch them with his still-sluggish reflexes.

_Alerted by the noise, Jun looked back. Seeing his passenger was awake, he stopped the Warthog gently and dismounted, walking around

to the back of the cab._

"You're up quickly. We're only about 2 hours out of Azsod, and you took some pretty serious wounds back there. Can you sit up?"

Noble 6 attempted to comply, but quickly lay back down as he could feel blood start to run down his torso. Jun jumped up on the cab. "Still immobile, eh? Well, here's a medpac I found alongside the road half a klick back." Handing him a medkit, he turned around and seated himself behind the wheel again. "We need to keep moving. The Covvies have started glassing Azsod, and we need to keep ahead of it."

Noble 6 looked around yet again for his helmet, naked without the protection it offered even when badly damaged. Jun noticed.

"Looking for your helmet? Here." The helmet flew from the drivers' seat into his lap, and he gingerly started to put it on. "Won't do much for you, though. It's cracked all to ****, and the shielding in your suits nearly fried. It'll stop maybe one plasma shot before it fails. I would recommend not putting it on, it'll hurt more than harm if you can't see."

Disregarding this advice, Noble 6 put on his helmet, and it attempted to seal with a hiss of rushing gases, but failed. The cause of this failure were the multiple cracks spiderwebbing the small visor slit, reducing his visibility measurably. However, he was safe, he had his armor.

Jun shook his head, not taking his eyes off the road. "So you still need to hide your face? Even Reach couldn't teach you to trust us?"

Noble 6 opened his mouth to speak, but all that came out was a harsh rasp as both finally realized that he hadn't drunk any water for a day while in vicious combat.

Jun grabbed something at his feet, momentarily slowing down, and tossed it to him. "Here, I thought you might want some refreshment. Savor it, this is the last New Alexandria bottled water. The rest was glassed when the factory fell."

Noble 6 unsealed the small flap in his helmet for eating, and quickly guzzled it down. However, he soon felt drowsy, a feeling he recognized as strong sedatives. Turning an accusing eye (or visor, really) to Jun, he gave him the best glare he could in his weakened state.

Jun shrugged, a sight visible through the rearview mirror. "What can I say? I can't have you rolling off the back of the 'Hog trying to do something foolishly heroic. Not that there's anyone left to save with heroism.

They're all dead."

NOBLE 6: I need some food.

CLASSIFIED: Very well, we'll continue this after lunch. End recording.

_ *END RECORDING*_

_Replay? Y/_N_

3. Session 3: Unexpected Life

A/N: Here's chapter 3!

Enjoy, Billybobjoe47s

Run classrec001216974. â€| Authorization confirmed. Beginning playbackâ€|..

CLASSIFIED: Alright, now that you've eaten, can we continue?

NOBLE 6: Certainly.

He woke next in a cave, packed with supplies, as well as a large cargo truck and several Warthogs.

He turned his head to see Jun sitting near the entrance with binoculars, staring into the reddened sky.

"This was supposed to be the exit point for Company Charlie. But none of them made it, and their death allows us to live. We've got all we need here." Jun turned. "Sorry for putting you out, but that medpac was the only thing I had back on the Warthog. I've got a full MJOLNIR repair unit in the truck, along with a full med center. You should be able to move now, but take it easy. Also, go get your armor serviced. It looks like ****."

He turned back to the sky, and Noble 6 got up and turned towards the cargo truck, but sprinted to Jun's side when he gasped. "*****! Take a look, Six!"

Taking the binoculars, Noble 6 looked up and saw the familiar blue and black of slipspace ruptures. It seemed like the entire Covenant fleet had left, leaving only a single cruiser and a quarter-dozen corvettes in the skies.

"Where do you suppose they're going?"

"Don't care. All that matters is now we have a chance."

Noble 6 stood and slowly walked over to the truck, getting in. The whirring of a MJOLNIR repair unit could be heard, and Jun said, "Six, as soon as your armor's repairs we're getting out of here. This is still too close to Azsod, and that cruiser is going to continue glassing. We need to find another shelter, one that's glassing-proof."

"Very well."

NOBLE 6:I know now that they went after the Autumn. They really cared about that Halo, and so my sacrifice also ended up being my redemption and savior. Ironical that what should have killed me saved me as well.

(Buzzing sound)

CLASSIFIED: Excuse me. (Riffling) Oh! I'm afraid we must cut this short; an emergency has come up within the (CLASSIFIED) program. We'll have to continue tomorrow.

NOBLE 6: Very well.

CLASSIFIED: End recording.

*END RECORDING *

Replay? Y/N

4. Session 4: A Hidden Blessing

A/N: Well, here's chapter 4, the longest yet at 1700 words! (Frankly, that's pitiful, I'll try to get longer chapters. Or would you rather have shorter chapters more frequently?)> Anyway,

Enjoy the insanity!

Billybobjoe47s

Run classrec001216974. â€| Authorization confirmed. Beginning playbackâ€|..

CLASSIFIED: Well, now that that particular crisis was solved, we can continue with the debriefing. Also, your experience would be much appreciated within the (CLASSIFIED). Would you consider joining (CLASSIFIED)? The pay's good.

NOBLE 6: No.

CLASSIFIED: Very well, we'll just continue where we left off then.

NOBLE 6: Fine.

After Noble 6 had gotten his armor repaired, he walked out to find that the makeshift camp was already mostly packed, waiting in a pile net to the cargo truck.

Jun looked up from his cleaning of his sniper rifle. "Good, you're done. We're moving out. Help me get all this into the truck."

After several minutes of packing, Jun threw the last package into the truck. Even with the vast amount of material there, including the MJOLNIR repair unit, the size of a shipping crate, the massive vehicle was still only slightly more than half full.

"Alright," Jun said, walking to the front of the truck and climbing in. "We have a possible shelter about 200 clicks away, so we'd better get moving. He shut the door, the sound echoing through the cave.

_Noble 6 climbed into the other side, sitting next to Jun in the

silence._

They had been driving for roughly half an hour, when Jun slowed. "Looks like a homestead up ahead. Maybe they'll have survivorsâ€¦.. or most likely a host of dead bodies and supplies."

The truck stopped, and they disembarked. They walked into the homestead, which was relatively intact. Sure enough, several dead bodies were there, but to their surprise, weapons and the occasional Grunt were strewn around the building.

"Looks like these colonists put up a fight. Wonder why they didn't run?"

Ducking into a half-collapsed doorway, Jun stopped dead. "Son of a ****," he said slightly admiringly. This room held around a dozen dead colonistsâ€¦. As well as two dead Elites. "Well, that's a surprise. Civvies taking out a couple of Elites? What were they guarding that needed to have a dozen men, who could have escaped, throw themselves at the Covvies?"

Noble 6 kicked aside the body of one Elite, searching it for any grenades. Finding one, he scooped it up and attached it to his waist, magnetically locking it there. However, kicking the Elite aside had also discovered something else: A trapdoor, welded shutâ€¦. from the inside.

"Jun, trapdoor here. And it looks like it's been welded from the inside."

Jun rushed over. "We might have survivors then, let's get this open." However, the welds had been good, and the leverage was awkward. The two SPARTANS were unable to open the trapdoor.

Jun shrugged. "I doubt this is the only entrance. Must be another around here. Even civvies aren't so stupid as to run into a place with only one exit, and then shut the exit permanently."

Leaving the room behind, after taking all the weapons and grenades strewn about the room, Noble 6 glanced at the pile of weapons in the main room. Quite substantial, for such a were even a few Covenant weapons mixed in, though they were mostly the nearly-useless plasma pistols preferred by Grunt infantry.

"Jun, second floor." Noble 6 had noticed a discolored spot on the ceiling, too regular to be simply a stain. Reaching up, he could just brush the bottom of the ceiling, and so with a jump, he thrust his fist through the ceiling.

Sure enough, the stain was a door, as evidenced by the fact that the piece of ceiling which it occupied had seperated from the rest with a squeal of breaking hinges. Casting that aside, Noble 6 saw a ladder just within the door. Jumping again and gently grabbing hold of the ladder, he pulled it down. However, the ladder was ramshackle and flimsy, obviously made by someone with little woodworking experience.

Gingerly, Noble 6 put a fraction of his half-ton weight on the ladder. It creaked alarmingly, and a sharp crack was heard.

"Jun, we have an attic, but there's no way up. Suggestions?"

"Six, you really need to think outside of the box, be creative. Watch." Jun exited to the next room over, and returned dragging a thick metal table. Dropping it with a clang to the floor, he jumped on it and then jumped into the hole in the low roof, the table only bending slightly.

Six followed his lead, but this time, the table bent alarmingly as he leapt off of the table, now bent nearly in half. Ignoring that fact, he looked around the attic. Dusty crates, a few more weapons strewn about, and a solitary window, shards of glass the only remnant of the window.

After collecting the weapons and throwing them back down the hole, Noble 6 walked over to the window while Jun broke open the crates and inspected the contents, which were just personal effects of no great value. However, a much more interesting sight greeted Noble 6 as he looked out the window.

On the opposite side of the house from the cargo truck, there was a great blackened crater, the surface glass. It was obviously the work of a concentrated Wraith barrage for many minutes.

"Jun, I think I found what the Covvies were searching for. It's under that crater."

"Good work Six, let's check it out."

Breaking the few glass shards left in the pane, Six leapt out the window, landing on one knee outside. Straightening, he walked to the center of the blackened crater, tapping at the ground. "Looks like they didn't get through before they left. See another entrance, Jun?"

Jun walked over to him. "No, no sign of an entrance. Maybe it was here, and they hit it so hard it melted."

However, that thought was broken as the ground crumbled underneath them, sending them 50 feet to a slamming stop.

"Agh!" Six groaned as he stood. "Jun, you green?"

"Yeah Six, but our armor's all dented again. Looks like another trip into the MJOLNIR repair unit later. Anyway, looks like we found what the trapdoor led to. Let's take a look around, shall we?"

The room in question was dimly lit, crates stacked 20 feet high in places, full of supplies. A handful of bodies lay dead in the room. Six checked one, and found he had died when he inhaled too much superheated air, destroying his alveoli.

Jun whistled. "There are a lot of supplies here, Six. If we took some, we could fill up the truck."

_Six nodded. "Do it." As he walked over to check the contents of a crate, he saw a dusty panel of metal on one stone wall. Curious, he walked over and brushed the dust off of the panel, revealing a familiar map, a map of Reach. Dots of various sizes, painted a bright

red to the grey of metal, were strewn about the map, and a circle surrounded one particular location, a place that corresponded roughly to the homestead above them._

_ "Jun, I found a map. Looks like there's more of these hidden caches. If we can find one that hasn't been compromised, we could stay there." _

_ Jun looked over. "A map? Grab it. We'll throw it in the truck so we can look at it later. Then, come help me check these crates." _

_ Six nodded, and proceeded to grip the sides of the metal map. However, the map was bolted into the wall, and there wasn't enough room for his hands to get a good grip, meaning he couldn't wrench it off the wall. However, Six chose another option, moving to the side of the map and delivering a powerful kick to the side of the map. That side dented slightly, but the entire map moved as well, and several kicks later, two of the bolts broke with a crack. Six proceeded to insert his hands into the gap left and pried the map off the wall._

_ He tossed that to the center of the room, then proceeded to start checking crates._

_ After cataloguing the remaining supplies, including a vast amount of dehydrated food and ammunition, the two main things they needed desperately, they had finished with their task here._

_ Jun walked to the edge of the perimeter, where a door was located. As Six followed, Jun tried the handle, to find it locked. Kicking the door in, they continued into a hallway, a staircase located at the other end. At the top of the staircase, another locked door resided, soon also kicked in._

_ The last room was a small one, with the trapdoor they had found at the top of the room, with a platform just below it, with sturdy metal ladders connecting the floor, platform, and trapdoor._

_ Climbing the ladders, which held surprisingly well, they stood on the platform. The trapdoor was only about 6 feet above them, and so crouching, they easily broke the welds from this side, with much more leverage available to crack the weld beads._

_ Clambering out of the trapdoor, they soon returned to the hidden cavern, returning dragging the first load of supplies out to the cargo truck. After several such loads, they closed the trapdoor, with Six holding the map under one arm._

_ As they boarded the cargo truck, and began to leave the homestead, Jun said thoughtfully, "How did these civilians get so much ammunition and food?" _

CLASSIFIED: Well, that was our most productive session yet, but I'm afraid I'll have to cut it short. The doctors have recommended that you get a good deal of sleep, and it's getting late.

NOBLE SIX: Whatever you say. Sir, is (CLASSIFIED?)

CLASSIFIED: Well, (CLASSIFIED), and since (CLASSIFIED), it's (CLASSIFIED)

NOBLE SIX: Good.

CLASSIFIED: End recording.

END RECORDING

Replay? Y/N

5. Session 5: Moving Out

_A/N: Oh my goodness, I'm so sorry! I've been caught up in other things, and I've forgotten to write for the __longest __time. But here's a little tidbit to hopefully keep you from lynching me for a few days._

Run classrec001216974. â€| Authorization confirmed. Beginning playbackâ€|..

CLASSIFIED: Welcome back to Debriefing, Noble Six. Do you remember where we left off last evening?

NOBLE SIX: Yes.

CLASSIFIED: You can start any time you want.

As the truck rumbled to a stop within their cave, Jun jumped out and surveyed the only things left behind, a Warthog and the MJOLNIR repair unit. As he walked into the latter, he called, "Six, I need you to drive the Warthog tomorrow. We're moving to one of the locations on that map. Also, is that cruiser in sight? We don't want to be attracting attention to ourselves if it's too close."

Noble 6 turned and strode to the entrance, grabbing a pair of binoculars from beneath the front seat. As he scanned the sky, only one corvette could be seen as a small purple blob many miles away, on the other side of Aszod.

"Jun, good news. The cruiser's nowhere in sight, and the nearest ship is about 250 miles away."

Jun strode out of the MJOLNIR repair unit. "Good. Then tomorrow is a good time to get moving."

They exchanged places, Jun scanning the sky and Six within the MJOLNIR repair unit.

_As Six felt his shoulder pauldrons and right greaves being removed and replaced, a soft beeping noise came from the control console on right. Glancing over, he saw a blinking message on the screen. It read, '_Replacement parts exhausted. Major repairs no longer possible. Minor repairs down to 85% original integrity. Beginning recycling of low-integrity scrap.'

Noble Six knew that was bad. That was very bad. The armor was the main thing truly setting them apart from the Marinesâ€"who died like flies. Without that, they wouldn't stand much of a chance.

_"Jun. MJOLNIR repair says it's out of replacement parts. We've got a

problem."_

Jun whipped his head around. "Out of parts? ****. That means we get to try to find high-grade titanium so that it can manufacture some more. That's going to be fun. Why was this not fully stocked? I didn't know there were any other SPARTAN teams in this area during the entire battle."

Six said slowly as he walked out. "Perhaps one of these other sites on the map holds some titanium."

Jun nodded decisively. "Perhaps. We're moving out to one tomorrow; what's the closest?"

"Next closest is 200 miles away."

"Well, than we'd better buckle up for a long drive."

BEEP

NOBLE SIX: Excuse me. (CLASSIFIED) wants me for my first physical evaluation.

CLASSIFIED: Very well. But please remind (CLASSIFIED) that this debriefing is important? At this rate, we'll soon fall behind schedule.

NOBLE SIX: Of course.

CLASSIFIED: End recording.

END RECORDING

Replay? Y/N

6. Session 6: Highway

A/N: Sorry for the long wait, but this one's a nice, longer chapter. Also, do you think I should flip between the briefing and what's currently happening, or stick to the briefing for this story? Please tell me.

Enjoy!

Run classrec001216974. â€| Authorization confirmed. Beginning playbackâ€|..

CLASSIFIED: How was the evaluation?

NOBLE SIX: Everything checked out. Apparently, I need to eat a more balanced diet, but in all mental and athletic things I meet parameters.

CLASSIFIED: That's good to hear. We may need your help on some missions in the future. We've heard reports of (CLASSIFIED) in the (CLASSIFIED) system, and we need enough SPARTANs to form a (CLASSIFIED).

NOBLE SIX: Well, I'm not one to refuse an assignment from on high. Is

this an ONI mission, or an actual, sanctioned mission?

CLASSIFIED: I'm not at liberty to say that.

NOBLE SIX: Ah, so that's how it's going to be.

CLASSIFIED: How about we just get on with the debriefing? My superiors are eager to hear the full story.

The next morning, Six and Jun once again heaved the MJOLNIR repair crate into the truck, before Jun stepped into the cab. He said, "Six, you have the Warthog. Feel free to splatter any Covies that get too close."

Six grinned. That was the kind of order he liked. "Yes sir."

As he revved up the Warthog, he placed the map next to him, diagonally aligned. If he glanced away from the road, he could see his destination, as well as the nearest highway to the location.

_ "We're going to want to head along the Viery Highway for about 160 miles. The rest will be through back roads, and what looks like a small town."_

_ "Lead the way, Six." The cargo truck started up with a rumble, and the Warthog spun out of the cave, the cargo truck just behind._

The silence of the planet was oppressive, and in its own subtle way, terrifying. Just a few miles up the torn and battered highway was the start of a forest, but most of the trees were dead now, bullets and plasma knocking them over and scorching their trunks. The once-lush land had been turned into a wasteland in a fortnight. This was the legacy of the Covenant, the UNSC. Death and destruction, leaving behind a wasted planet, incapable of hosting life for hundreds of thousands of years afterwards. Nothing would grow here for a long time.

The highway wasn't much better off. Though it had avoided the main focus of the battle, and had no collapsed spans, the surface looked like a moon, with craters every few feet. It was slow going if they didn't want to overturn one of the trucks.

Thus it was evening before they made it to the turnoff, close to where Six estimated the hideout was. The sign had been torn off and used as a shield, and the name of the once-town was no longer readable through black scorch marks and the silver of melted metal. The only letter visible was a 'z'.

However, around, the garrison and townspeople had at least given some back. The K-Rails on either side of the highway were littered with bullet pocks and, mixed with the black of the asphalt, the purple and blue of Covenant blood was staining the road.

The exit was blocked by K-Rails, scorched and broken. Though the barrier had been broken enough to allow foot troops through, the cargo truck was not so nimble. They would have to move the barriers in order to allow the cargo truck to turn onto the relatively well-kept road behind them.

As Six and Jun dismounted, leaving the truck behind, they surveyed the K-rail barricade. "Well, now that's going to be a pain to move," said Jun. Six could do nothing but agree.

But if they wanted to get into the town before full night fell, they would have to move it, and with haste, at that. It was tough going; the K-Rails, designed to resist impacts from cars, did not shift easily. Without the Warthog and its tow cable, the job would have taken several days. Even so, dark had fallen by the time a hole large enough for the cargo truck had been formed.

Six leaned over, resting on the Warthog. A SPARTAN he may have been, but several hours of hard labor, moving things purposely designed to be as hard to move as possible, had taken some energy out of him. He felt a drop of sweat run down his face, and resisted the urge to attempt to wipe it away. It would have looked ridiculous anyway, attempting to wipe away sweat beneath a helmet.

Jun had no such qualms; he simply removed his helmet and wiped away the sweat with the palm of his hand. "I swear, how do Marines and civvies move those things? Really, they managed to make a barricade! And then there's us, SPARTANS, struggling to move them. This town must have had some serious moving equipment to just throw together a barricade like that." Replacing his helmet, he got back to business. "Time to get into the town and stop for the night. We don't want any Covvie infrareds to pick us up as we go traipsing through the backcountry."

They had long since shut off the engines, so they were startled to hear the cargo truck rumble to life behind them. "What theâ€" Jun exclaimed, and as they turned, they saw the door slam and the truck begin to pull away.

"That truck is OURS, thank you very much!" The truck thief had not accounted for the speed of a SPARTAN. They caught up with the slowly accelerating truck in a few seconds, and as Jun leaped upon the step, he wrenched the door open.

Both were momentarily stunned as a human figure, cloaked but unmistakable, sat within the driver's seat. He attempted to use that surprise to punch Jun out of the cockpit, a maneuver that would have worked with a normal man.

But a thousand pounds of metal was not a normal man, and so it was that the man recoiled, cursing, now sporting a bruised and bleeding fist. He might have even broken a few fingers, but it was hard to tell right now.

With a deadly silence, Jun grabbed him, before throwing him into the brush on the other side of the road. But this did not come at a cost. Six heard the revving of the Warthog, and with a curse, he began to run back.

But a Warthog was made for much more speed and acceleration than a cargo truck, and soon it sped down the road to the town, out of sight.

"****!" Six slammed a fist into a K-rail. They had fallen for a classic trap like dupes. At least the cargo truck, with its varied and valuable cargo, was intact and in their hands.

As he ran over to the truck, he saw Jun stop it and turn off the engine with a rumble. He commed, "Six, get in the truck and keep anyone else from trying to take it while I interrogate this man."

As Six mounted the steps, Jun walked over to where the would-be truck thief lay, groaning. He had probably broken some ribs, being thrown out of a moving vehicle, but that was the least of his worries.

Jun picked him up by the throat, choking off a pained scream. He transferred a second hand to the throat, while loosening the airways.

"Please, don't kill me!" The man whispered, shaking with fear.

"I'm not going to kill you if you tell me everything. Who are you?"

_"Bernat Gy      " _

"Why did you try to steal our truck?"

"W-we needed the fuel cells, and it was a tempting target."

"How many people are you with?"

"I-I don't know."

Jun slammed him to the ground, eliciting a groan. "I know you're lying. Tell me, or you will die."

"I REALLY DON'T KNOW! I th-think around fifty, but I'm not sure! Please, please, don't kill me!" The man began to cry, and the words degenerated into Hungarian babble. "Saj      , sajn      , k      , ne        meg! Nem akarok meghalni ..."

Jun picked him up and slung him over his shoulder with a snort. "I wish we still had Jorge around. I never bothered to learn Hungarian. You learn?"

Six shook his head. "This is my first full tour on Reach; there was never a reason before."

"Well, that's going to be a problem out in the boonies. Obviously, these people survived the Holocaust." Jun slung the man into the passenger seat, before tightly securing him with a piece of rope and the seatbelt. "Don't move."

As they met in the back of the truck, Six sighed. "They got the Warthog while we fell for the bait."

Jun whistled. "We fell for that? Really? I think we need some more food and water. We're probably not thinking like we should." Unspoken was the realization that a SPARTAN should never be taken like that. Even in extenuating circumstances like these.

_"Well, let's bunker here for the night. We'll go into the town in

daylight. And we'll have a trade to offer. Our Warthog for Bernat."__

_Six knew that the trade would simply be the easier of the two options for the townspeople. The second option, if they refused the trade, was that they took the Warthog anyway. And most likely got some people killed.__

_"If we can," said Six, "We need to keep as many people alive. Humans are an endangered species on Reach, now. If we can gather these people and maybe find some others, we'll have the makings of a good fortress. If the other location is anything like the last, we just might be able to live for a few years."__

_As night fell, they crouched outside the cargo truck, discussing possible courses of action for a good amount of time.__

BEEP

NOBLE SIX: *SIGH* I've gotten my first new operation. They're calling it (CLASSIFIED) and I'll be going (CLASSIFIED) to the (CLASSIFIED) System. I leave day after tomorrow.

CLASSIFIED: Well, it was only a matter of time. We'll hold one more briefing tomorrow, and then we'll wait until you return for the rest of the briefing. Is this a high-risk mission?

NOBLE SIX: No. Command estimates a 97% chance of survival and success, and another 1% death and success.

CLASSIFIED: Low-risk missions are the best ones. But please do all you can to return. This briefing is not exactly low on Command's priorities. Good night.

END RECORDING

Replay? Y/N

7. Session 7: Negotiations

Run classrec001216974.07 â€| Authorization confirmed. Beginning playbackâ€|..

NOBLE SIX: I'm here.

CLASSIFIED: I see that. *chuckle* Though I must admit, I didn't hear it.

NOBLE SIX: Let's hurry. I have to get my new (CLASSIFIED) fitted, and the more time I have, the more customization the (CLASSIFIED) will be able to hold.

CLASSIFIED: Well then, let's just try to get past the meeting I assumed you had?

NOBLE SIX: Yes, sir.

_As the morning dawned, Six nudged Jun, who had fallen asleep while Six was on watch. "Morning, Jun. Ready to get back our

Warthog?"_

Jun just grunted and heaved himself upright. "Not a morning kind of person, Six. I need some coffee."

Six rolled his eyes. A SPARTAN, addicted to coffee. But he knew this already, so he tossed him a caffeine-containing food pouch. "Eat this for breakfast than."

Six himself was having what the pouch proudly proclaimed to be 'Eggs and Hashbrowns; Gourmet', but in reality it was more like egg paste with some hashbrown paste mixed in. He quickly finished it, before throwing the package to the ground. Why was it that no one had yet invented a good ration? They'd had 600 years to try.

While he drank some electrolyte fluid, he idly queried his database. It turned out that someone actually had, but the rations kept getting stolen. It was decided that mediocre rations were better than good rations that constantly went missing.

Throwing the fluid package to the ground, he looked up to see Jun doing the same. "Much better," he said. Pulling out his rifle, he inspected it carefully before loading a clip into it. "Ready to roll?"

"Yessir."

Jun clucked as he stood. "I'm not your superior anymore, Six. We might be the only military forces left on the continent. No more ranks until we find a reason to need them."

"Yessir."

The cargo truck started gladly with a rumble, and Bernat started awake, before groaning in pain. Six, wedged in between Jun and Bernat, opened a first-aid kit. "This should patch you up for a few hours," he said as he stuck a biofoam canister into the area where ribs were definitely cracked. For a few moments, the screams that only came from biofoam echoed in the small cab, followed by a long sigh as the pain was replaced by the painkillers and mild narcotics within the biofoam. "Now hush."

_Jun edged the truck through the gap in the K-rails, and accelerated the truck to dangerous speeds on the other side. It bumped uncontrollably, and Six swore he felt the back fishtail more than a few times. Bernat was screaming, understandably. A cargo truck was __not__ meant to do this._

But it served its purpose, and even as it screeched past the first small homesteads, scrambling figures could be seen outside, caught unawares. With the wailing of brakes, the truck stopped in the small circle at the center of the town. Six and Jun hopped out, guns already surveying the scene.

Within seconds, scuffles and muffled breathing could be heard, and the small impressions of gun barrels appeared on several roofs. Their cover was impressive, but it wouldn't help. Not really.

Six switched on external speakers with a crackle. "Who here speaks English?" he said, swiveling out in a circle.

One man stepped out from a pile of rubble. "I do. But," he pointed a finger menacingly, "You make one wrong move and we'll fill you with lead."

"Somehow, I doubt that," Jun said with a hint of amusement. "We want our Warthog back."

"Warthog? What Warthog?" Neither of them were fooled.

"Ours, the one you stole last night. Serial Number EE-0418658."

"It's ours now. It's needed here."

"Well then," Jun said thoughtfully, "Do you have a greater need for this then... hm, let's see, a certain man named Bernat?"

A gasp could be heard from opposite. "Bernat?" the man demanded. Quickly, he regained his composure. "Let's see him."

"Six?"

He mounted the steps to the truck, and when he emerged he was carrying Bernat by the scruff. "Here he is."

"How do we know he isn't dead?"

Six plunked him on the ground. He looked around fearfully. "Comrades? Are you here to save me?"

With an inner grin, Jun offered, "Proof enough?"

The man sighed. "We'll bring your Warthog." With a series of rapid hand signals, there was scuffling as at least 2 men left the roofs. "It'll be here in a minute."

Six squinted. That was way too many signals for a simple retrieval. There had to be something in the works. "Jun, watch for tricks," he warned softly.

"Roger that, Six," came the reply. He saw Jun's gun raise fractionally up from its position. Six himself put a hand slowly to his M6C holder.

The Warthog returned with a screech next to the leader. Strangely enough, despite the signs of two people leaving, there was only one in the Warthog...

"Now, let Bernat go." Six looked at Jun, who nodded. They both knew the trap about to spring.

With a shove, Bernat stumbled over, but the man yelled, "Down!" and he dropped to the ground. So too, however, did the SPARTANS. The chain gun on the Warthog revved and tore a line in the dirt behind them—"center of mass had they stood.

_With a boom, the chain gun stopped. Jun stood, gun smoking. Another boom silenced the villagers' leader. "Now, we're going to take our Warthog and continue down this road. Anyone else object?" Absolute

silence. "Good."_

The men of the town stood in shock as the truck and the Hog rumbled away.

SIX: I have to go, now.

CLASSIFIED: Very well.

END RECORDING

Replay? Y/N

8. Session 8: A Change in Scale

A/N: So here's the next section, with apologies for the slow post. However, I've begun work on a podcast of my own, with my own signature brand of craziness. You can find it at .com. If you like my stories, give it at least a look-see- or a look-listen, as the case may be. I'm Cyan Four.

Enjoy!

Billybobjoe47s

Run classrec001216974. â€| Authorization confirmed. Beginning playbackâ€|..

NOBLE SIX: Nice to see you too.

CLASSIFIED: I'm sorry for the rush. The ramifications your last assignment brought were... unexpected, to say the least. Anyway, where were we?

NOBLE SIX: The meeting.

CLASSIFIED: Ah yes. The meeting that turned out so badly. Shall we continue?

NOBLE SIX: Yessir.

As the vehicles rumbled down the road, Jun shook his head. "What did they think they were doing? Trying to shoot a SPARTAN?"

_ "They were desperate. Desperation makes men do strange things."_

_ "I know that," Jun replied angrily. "But how desperate do you have to be to try to attack a SPARTAN? That isn't desperation, that's suicide!"_

Six agreed heartily. They were out of their minds... but then again, maybe you had to be to have survived this long. He kept that thought to himself, though.

_The road wound through a verdant forest, incredibly nearly untouched. The unnamed town must have held off the Covenant from this part of Reach. Birds chirped and bushes rustled, a bastion of life among the death covering the planet. Though the one vestige of

outside this patch of the former Reach couldn't erase was the ever-present faint smell of chemical propellant and plasma._

Before long, Six said, "This should be where the hideout is. My HUD is predicting within 500 feet."

Both cars came to a stop, and Six leapt out of the truck. Instead of the thump of hard ground beneath his feet, a soft crunching and crackling came as a stick was pulverized underfoot. Another crack came from Jun's feet, and then there was near-silence. Occasionally a bird chirped or squirrel chattered, but from the SPARTANs came nary a sound.

Carefully, they rendezvoused by the cargo truck, before consulting softly. "Search pattern G?" asked Six.

"Affirmative," replied Jun.

Jun headed east and Six headed west, stepping around sticks and bushes that might make a sound. The rustlings from their movement were so soft they were drowned out by the light breeze and the sounds of wildlife easily. Six was uneasy in such loud background noise. Every chirp felt like a warning call, every chattering squirrel sounded like distant gunfire. Even the wind brought memories of Phantoms cruising overhead.

His movement was slow, and punctuated by frequent stops as his instincts reacted to an innocuous sound. From the locator on his HUD, Jun was doing even worse than he was. As Six continued, frequent muffled curses in Russian could be heard as Jun kept changing directions erratically.

A soft beeping came from his HUD, and Six noticed that his and Jun's heart rates were both noted as unhealthily fast. Was this really what they had come to? So bred for combat that a simple woodland was more stressful than a battlefield? How were they ever supposed to become normal once the war was over? If a simple woodland made you ever alert, what would a teasing poke from a coworker do?

Six could see the grisly scene; the SPARTAN would almost certainly grab the offending arm and break it, then throw the man it was attached to across the room. Not a good recipe for blending in.

And then Six grimly remembered the truth. More likely, the Covenant would obliterate most of humanity; the SPARTANs would be the last to die. They had already gotten to Reach; and that was humanities' strongest planet. The others would fall, too, in time...

Six wrenched his train of thought away and looked up to see a large, tree covered hill dominating the landscape in front of him. It would make a nice viewpoint to see the entrance to this hideoutâ€”though the last one had been undergroundâ€”

"Jun, you found anything yet?" Six asked.

_ "No, nothing except wildlife and trees. You?"_

_"There's a large hill here. And since the last hideout was underground, it might make sense it's underneath this hill. Come to

my pos and help me search it."_

"Affirmative."

As Jun's marker came closer, Six began to circle the bottom of the hill. It was slow going as the undergrowth grew thicker, and he had gone only a handful of yards when Jun appeared. "Which way, Six?"

"Go up the hill and this way. This undergrowth is suspiciously thicker here; there's no way that it got suddenly so thick in just a few feet."

"Understood."

As Jun trotted up the hill, Six continued to rip his way through the bushes. It grew so thick that he began to use his knife like a machete, which he knew would dull the blade horribly. But it could always be sharpened. Sap began to cover his armor, and his gloves felt sticky, and yet he had hardly moved.

As Six attempted to wipe off the sap, it simply smeared all over his greaves. The sticky SPARTAN frowned; it would be a pain to clean the sap out of all the nooks and crannies in his armor.

Luckily, Jun's voice crackled through. "Six? I found something. Come to my pos."

Six gratefully disentangled himself and walked through the trail he had carved back to his original spot. As he trekked uphill, he asked, "What did you find?"

"It's... well... just come see for yourself."

Six began to sprint. Anything a SPARTAN couldn't describe had to be incredible.

Jun was near the crest of the hill, where it plateaued out. He was standing stock still.

"What is it, Jun?"

Jun pointed wordlessly at the top of the hill, a green, grassy field. Six looked carefully, and then noticed something.

The grass never moved in the wind. And it was all a uniform length and size. The area in which this was true encompassed most of the top of the hill, some several acres.

"Something artificial is underneath that false turf." Jun knelt and ripped a small piece off. "Shall we figure out what it is?"

The first few rips quickly revealed that the layer of dirt underneath the grass was very thin, not more than half an inch. And beneath it was grade-A titanium, ship hulling. Jun knocked once, softly, and listened to the echo carefully. "More than a foot thick. Someone had some serious money. Still, it's hollow on the other side."

"Jun? Have you noticed the shape of this turf?"

"It's round. Why?"

"Because it's the perfect size for a medium-sized hangar bay, like on a destroyer." Six looked at Jun. "What kind of equipment and funding do the people within have to have hull-grade titanium and a hangar, almost certainly full of vehicles?"

Jun's answer was, "Let's not fool around with these people. They have weapons that just might be able to kill us."

END RECORDING

Replay? Y/N

End
file.